

McGregor, Richard (2020) In plain sight: aspects of developmental process in Sally Beamish's Seafarer trilogy. *Scottish Music Review*, 5 . pp. 87-111.

Downloaded from: <http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/5167/>

***Usage of any items from the University of Cumbria's institutional repository 'Insight' must conform to the following fair usage guidelines.***

Any item and its associated metadata held in the University of Cumbria's institutional repository Insight (unless stated otherwise on the metadata record) may be copied, displayed or performed, and stored in line with the JISC fair dealing guidelines (available [here](#)) for educational and not-for-profit activities

**provided that**

- the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
  - a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
- the content is not changed in any way
- all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

**You may not**

- sell any part of an item
- refer to any part of an item without citation
- amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator's reputation
- remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

The full policy can be found [here](#).

Alternatively contact the University of Cumbria Repository Editor by emailing [insight@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:insight@cumbria.ac.uk).

# In Plain Sight: Aspects of Developmental Process in Sally Beamish's *Seafarer* Trilogy

Richard E. McGregor

University of Cumbria

For a composer who has been described as being 'at the top of her game and the pinnacle of her profession', there is currently a complete lack of critical analysis of Sally Beamish's compositional style and technique.<sup>1</sup> Interviews and reviews content themselves with a more or less descriptive approach, while praising her ear for orchestral colour, particularly her affinity with string instruments or with voices. The former is usually explained by reference to her years as an ensemble player with, for example, *Lontano* and the Raphael Ensemble, while the latter is related back to the fact that her father was an amateur singer, and an aunt had a number of professional singing engagements. There are only so many times that a biography can be repeated, and Beamish is in good company with other well-respected composers such as James MacMillan who suffered for many years from the curse of the biography without analytical content.

Interviewed by the author on two occasions, Beamish gave some tentative clues as to the origins of her compositional technique. In 2000 she responded to a question about pre-planning of composition with a hint of late-Stravinskian procedure:

I do use [motifs] in a serial type of way with a series of transpositions so that I do make a note square with a 5 note motif and I transpose it and put them all on top of each other and then I have harmonies as well going down.<sup>2</sup>

Interviewed again during the 2012 *Musica Scotica* conference in Glasgow, she was somewhat more forthcoming as to the origin and nature of this working method:

[Oliver Knussen] showed me a way of manipulating notes. I had this big thing about, well, why would it be that note and not another note, and is someone going to come to me and say, why is it that chord – I was always worried about knowing why exactly I was doing everything. And he showed me a very simple system of generating mel... [*sic*] why I like it is because it comes from a melody –

<sup>1</sup> Tumelty 2006, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Beamish 2000.

you think of a melody, and then you make it, you generate harmonies from it by making a sort of grid, and the harmonies work with this melody.<sup>3</sup>

An obvious starting point to interrogate Beamish's statement that 'you think of a melody and ... you generate harmonies from it making a sort of grid' is the *Capriccio* for bassoon and piano written in 1988. In her programme note for *Capriccio*, she claimed to have 'found her own voice for the first time', and this work will be referenced later.<sup>4</sup> Beamish was equally unequivocal when asked what she believed to be one of her most characteristic works, responding with: 'I think I would suggest my second viola concerto, *The Seafarer*'.<sup>5</sup> Analysing this work, it quickly became apparent that to understand its structure and content, two other related works had to be considered. The first of these, for solo violin, *The Lone Seafarer*, written to commission in 1998, took its title from the well-known Anglo-Saxon poem, 'The Seafarer'. Subsequently, as the result of a new commission, the composer took the existing material from the solo work and expanded it in 1999/2000 into a Trio (*The Seafarer Trio*) for violin, cello and piano with reciter and projected slides. The concluding work of the trilogy, the Second Viola Concerto *The Seafarer*, uses the same basic material but this time drawing from the Trio rather than the solo violin work. Beamish explains in her programme note that she 'began to hear more orchestral textures' and wanted to 'explore the material further'.<sup>6</sup>

The idea of expanding from a smaller work into a larger one has been a normal method of working for Beamish. In the 2000 interview, her response to the question as to whether she revised works or not was revealing in relation to her understanding of the development of formal and structural ideas:

I only revise a piece by writing it into another piece. So maybe if I've written a chamber piece, both my symphonies and this oratorio that's coming up will have been based on material taken from the chamber piece. So that tends to be the way I work as I expand outwards.<sup>7</sup>

Beamish's style is characterised by its leanness. Musical gestures are economical and based on restricted pitch profiles which link melodic shapes developmentally, and to harmony, as the composer said, in quite a tightly constrained way, using repetition at varying pitch levels to achieve tonal and harmonic-space

---

<sup>3</sup> Beamish 2012a.

<sup>4</sup> Beamish 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Beamish 2012b.

<sup>6</sup> In discussing these works, reference will also be made to *Clara* for voice and piano which Beamish wrote in 1995 to words by Janice Galloway: Beamish 1995. Andrews refers to this work as 'one of Beamish's most powerful works for voice and piano'. Andrews 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Beamish 2000.

variety. Repetition of thematic content at different pitch levels is supported by elaboration of the musical material, particularly accompaniment, to achieve textural variety.

### **Background to Stylistic Elements: *Capriccio* (1987), *Clara* (1995) and *The Lone Seafarer* (1998)**

*Capriccio* is, on the face of it, quite a straightforward work to analyse, but it contains all the elements which constitute Beamish's mature style. For the purposes of this article only the formal structure and the nature of the thematic ideas will be considered.

In structural terms it is an extended ABA form with a coda derived from previous material:

A1 → A5, B, B varied, A recapitulated: A2/A5 on bassoon, A1 on piano → A2  
Coda: (A4 bassoon)/(B)

The first melodic motif in piano (Example 1) has the semitonal intervallic pattern 4,6,5 which, when stated in normal order, becomes A $\sharp$ , C, D $\sharp$ , E, (that is, semitone sequence 2,3,1), a transposition T2 of the chord (Example 2) which begins the work (also on piano). Other permutations of these four pitches are found throughout the work. In *Clara*, the same kind of connection between melodic motif and harmonic content is apparent. Ignoring the opening flourish, the remaining long held pitches on piano are given in Example 3. A $\flat$ , B $\flat$ , D, E is 2,4,2 in normal order (or possibly whole tone without C or F $\sharp$ ), and the chord heard at bar 8 (Example 4) – C $\sharp$ , D $\sharp$ , G, A – is this melodic idea a semitone lower. A certain consistency then is suggested in the way Beamish approaches pitch selection, and in different works there are similarities in pitch choice manipulation as evidenced in these two works, including the suggestion of a preference for certain intervals, in particular the major 2nd (also the minor 2nd not seen in these examples), the fourth and fifth, both perfect and diminished.

The opening motif of *The Lone Seafarer* confirms this predilection for pitch profile choice (Example 5) in that the first five pitches, G, A $\flat$ , D $\flat$ , E $\flat$ , D (1,5,2,11), when placed in normal order give D $\flat$ , D, E $\flat$ , G, A $\flat$  – intervallic sequence 1,1,4,1. This opening motif is then *apparently* expanded in bar 6 (Example 6) with the interval sequence 5,2,1,1,5 (normal order C, C $\sharp$ , D, F $\sharp$ , G – 1,1,4,1).<sup>8</sup> In fact, these are the same intervals as the opening motif but now a semitone lower and reordered.

---

<sup>8</sup> Beamish 2012c.

Examples 1–6 Thematic motif T2 of Example 2 at the opening of *Capriccio* (1988); Example 2. Opening tetrachord of *Capriccio*; Example 3. First thematic idea of *Clara* (1995); Example 4. Chord at b. 8 (Example 3 at T11); Example 5. Opening of *The Lone Seafarer*; Example 6. *The Lone Seafarer* first thematic expansion.



The consistency of approach adopted by Beamish to the development of motivic ideas will become obvious in the succeeding discussion.

### The *Seafarer* Trilogy

Composition of *The Seafarer* trilogy spanned the years 1997 to 2001, but the actual compositional sequence is a little unclear, partly because of an incorrect date that appears in score of the solo violin piece. Since it is relevant to the discussion of the thematic content of the work, clarification of this detail is relevant. The solo violin work was based, as noted previously, on the well-known Anglo-Saxon poem, *The Seafarer*, which has been translated into modern English many times, and into at least eight languages. According to the score, the work was performed by Anthony Marwood at the Seaton and District Club on 1 January 1998. The club secretary confirmed that this was an error and should have read 1 October 1998.<sup>9</sup> It is clear from the references to the poem in the score that it was not the complete poem which Beamish utilised for this work. When asked to clarify which version she had used, the composer responded:

I used the version which is on his [Charles Harrison-Wallace] website. I didn't change anything. He subsequently made a couple of changes which I have incorporated in the score, and one (I think) – the opening – which I preferred in the old version so didn't change ... The poem was sent to me by Jila Peacock, the artist who was making prints for illustrating the new translation. I happened to have a commission for solo violin (specifically for Anthony Marwood) so used the poem as a starting point. I then received the commission from Summer on the

<sup>9</sup> Juster 2013.

Peninsula to make a setting for narrator and piano trio to be performed with projections of Jila's prints.<sup>10</sup>

The problem with this statement is that the dates do not work. Correspondence with the translator Harrison-Wallace revealed that the initial translation which appeared in 1996 was of the first 99 lines only (out of 125), while that which now appears on his website is the complete version, dated 1999.<sup>11</sup> Apparently, Peacock heard Beamish's second symphony at its first performance during March 1998 in Glasgow, and thereafter sent the composer the incomplete poem, or the link to it, which she then used as the basis for *The Lone Seafarer*.<sup>12</sup> Peacock subsequently sent the composer copies of her monotype illustrations which became the projections attached to the Trio.

In her performance descriptors in *The Lone Seafarer*, Beamish uses words borrowed from the poetic text to describe the nature of the intended musical expression as the work progresses. For example, over the first bar she writes 'bitter, restless' which is derived from the poem's first stanza, 'enduring cares and bitter bale'. Beamish marks the second section (at bar 31), 'cold, clashing', which is taken from the text 'steering her clear of clashing cliffs | Cold fetters froze my feet'. It is clear, then, that the thematic material reflects the particular images found in the poem. In her programme note for the Trio written in 1999/2000, Beamish further described the semiquaver motif of section A as an 'undulating wave motif', followed by 'spiky hail-like counterpoint'. Where there is no descriptive word or text in *The Lone Seafarer*, the poetic text can be inferred from the structural divisions and the position of the words which overlay the music in the Trio. The form and related text of *The Lone Seafarer* are summarised below as Examples 7–17 (the score indications are given in bold type and a text version will be found at Figure 1):

<sup>10</sup> Beamish 2013. When Peacock's illustrations were published, they did not use Harrison-Wallace's translation, but one by Amy Kate Riach. See Riach and Peacock 2014 for selected examples of Peacock's illustrations. The video advertisement at the time of writing (August 2014) used music from Beamish's Second Viola Concerto, *The Seafarer*.

<sup>11</sup> Harrison-Wallace 2013. See Harrison-Wallace 1999 for Harrison-Wallace's translation.

<sup>12</sup> Peacock actually says in her programme note in the Trio score that she first read the poem in 1999, when asked to advise on the illustrations for the publication. I have concluded that the artist's encounter with the poem must be a year out and should be 1998.

Examples 7–17 *The Lone Seafarer*: thematic ideas related to structure and text

Section A (**bitter, restless**)  
"enduring cares and bitter bale"

Ex. 7

*pp cresc.* *p*

Repeats at T2 and T4

Section B1 bar 31 (**cold, clashing**)  
"steering her clear of the the clashing  
cliffs/ cold fetters froze my feet"

Ex. 8

*p*

Repeats at T4 → T3

Section B1b (**scouring**)  
"Hail scoured my skin"

Ex. 9

*p*

Section B2 bar 51 (**icy**)  
"all I ever heard along the ice-way"

Ex. 10

*p*

Section A1 (double time) bar 83 (**dark**)  
"the dark night deepens"

Ex. 11

*p*

(Bird call imitations) "whooper and curlew calls";  
"mewling gull"; "ice winged tern would taunt";  
"spray-feathered ospreys"

Original repeated at T8 → T9

→ Section B1 (part repeat, varied)

Section C (development) bar 105 (**hammering, yearning**)

B1 developed, references to A motif + B2 (bar 109)  
"yet my heart hammers now, yearning anew"

Ex. 12

*p*

bar 125 (**harp-like**)  
"he will not heed the harp though"

Ex. 13

*p*

C varied at T8  
A2 varied, bar 140

Ex. 14

*p*

bar 149  
B2 varied

Ex. 15

*p*

"the summons  
waits above on wing"

A3 varied, bar 161 (**swaying**)  
"across the water where the whale sways"

Ex. 16

*p*

CODA, bar 171 (**constant, clean**)  
"A man shall steer a steadfast course be  
constant, clean ..."

Ex. 17

*p*

Repeated T1 → T5

It will be evident from these examples that the pitch content of the whole work is controlled by the major/minor second, the fourth and the fifth, both perfect and diminished. The formal structure of this solo work is not so far removed from that of *Capriccio* as detailed above, relying as it does on a few clearly delineated sections which have resonance with traditional Sonata or Sonata Rondo Form:

EXPOSITION:

Section A bar 1 Ex. 7 '**bitter, restless**' = 'endless hauls of heaving waves' 'enduring cares and bitter bale'

Section B1a bar 31 Ex. 8 '**cold, clashing**' = 'steering her clear of clashing cliffs/Cold fetters froze my feet'

B1b bar 38 Ex.9 '**scouring**' = 'hail scoured my skin'

Repeat B1a at T4 → T3

Section B2 bar 51, Ex. 10, '**icy**' = 'All I ever heard along the ice-way'

Direct references Curlew, Gill, Osprey and Tern

= 'whooper and curlew calls, and mewling gull'

'the ice-winged tern would taunt'

'spray-feathered ospreys overhead would soar and scream'

Section B1 (varied) bar 76 varied (no words related)

Section A1 (double time) Ex. 11 bar 83 '**dark**' = 'the dark night deepens'

Repeat T8 → T9

DEVELOPMENT:

Section C 1 and 2 bar 105 Ex.12: B1 developed including reference to A motif at bar 111)

'**hammering, yearning**' = 'yet my heart hammers now, yearning anew'

(bar 111) 'rough seas' - inferred from Trio

(bar 125) Ex. 13 C3 'harp like' = 'he will not heed the harp though'

(bar 131) C1 varied '**restless**' 'wants no worldly joys' - inferred from Trio

(bar 134) 'rolling oceans urge him on' - inferred from Trio

(bar 136) C2 varied (no words related)

RECAPITULATION:

A(2) varied/augmentation octaves bar 140 Ex.14 'restless of that my thought is thrown..' - inferred from Trio

B2 birdsong repeat varied bar 149 Ex. 15 'the summons wails above on wing' - inferred from Trio

A(3) varied, bar 161 Ex. 16 '**swaying**' = 'across the water where the whale sways'



CODA:  
 (bar 171) Ex. 17 '**constant, clean**' = 'a man should steer a steadfast course be constant, clean..'  
                   Repeat T1 → T5  
 (bar 200) 'Come, consider where we have a home' - inferred from Trio  
 (bar 209) compressed repeat of A bars 1-12 = 'Amen, Amen, Amen' - inferred from Trio  
 [may also refer figuratively to the text 'where we have a home']

Figure 1 Formal structure of *The Lone Seafarer* for solo violin, 1998 (words in bold are from the poem)

The close correlation between the words of the poem and the thematic material indicates that Beamish has used the poetic imagery to suggest a broadly musical equivalent, such as the semiquavers representing hail in Example 9.

### From *The Lone Seafarer* to the Trio

The second work in the trilogy, the Trio, was not mentioned in the November 2000 interview with composer, although the work had received its first performance just two months earlier, in September 2000. In retrospect, however, this proximity perhaps explains Beamish's comment when discussing musical starting points:

I tend to think in terms of visual impetus ... very often words as well, so I'm often taking expression from other things ... so it's very often directly inspired by and even takes the form from something else like in the case of words ....<sup>13</sup>

1999, the year of the Trio's composition, was a significant one for the composer, in that she certainly had occasion to reconsider the nature of communication with an audience. Her 2012 interview response reveals the influence, perhaps indirectly, of James MacMillan's music:

I think the turning point [for me] was a trip to California in 1999. I think it was when I was aware of the real communication between players and audiences, where the audiences really expect to be engaged by the music, and it was Jimmy's *Isobel Gowdie* that was being played and there was a standing ovation at the end, with people with tears streaming down their faces, and coming up to me and saying 'do you know him?', or 'can you ask him to pray for my daughter?' – you know, they were just genuinely connected with the music and with the composer. And it made me think about the whole thing of communication.<sup>14</sup>

The musical examples discussed so far have suggested that Beamish builds most, if not all, her thematic material from short motivic ideas, and this applies

<sup>13</sup> Beamish 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Beamish 2012a.

equally to the development of horizontal and vertical material. The same economy of expression is related to the ways in which material is expanded outwards from a small group of instruments to a larger group as the rest of this article will show. As would be expected, fuller instrumental textures are created by adding additional layers – duets, trios, or, in the case of orchestral textures, placing new material in opposition to previously composed music. Thus, the expansion of the Trio to the Concerto did not add a significant amount of new thematic content to that found in the earlier work, so much as recontextualising what was already in existence. The comparative simplicity of this approach to compositional process represents a sort of developmental working ‘in plain sight’, and an accurate evaluation of Beamish’s work will only be achieved if the methodology is more clearly understood.

The musical material of the Trio’s first, second, and final sections was principally developed by expanding further the thematic ideas contained in the solo work, and by putting them into a harmonic context often already implied or suggested by the original context.<sup>15</sup> There are four particular ways in which these developments are expressed:

First, by swapping the original line between instruments including extending some pitches under or above the instrument which has taken over melodic the line; or, by adding chords to support or increase the instrumental density; or, by adding a line or lines moving in parallel or in octaves with the original (this can be seen, for example, at bar 145 *et seq.* in the Trio – see Example 20 for part of this passage – which is based on bar 83 *et seq.* in *The Lone Seafarer*).<sup>16</sup>

Second, by constructing a contrapuntal or imitative texture, often canonic in nature. For example, at bar 86–8 in the Trio, an imitative passage at T7 is passed between piano and violin at almost two bars’ distance. This imitative figure is a transposition at T3 of a piano figuration from bar 83 in the Trio, which in its turn derives from bar 47 in *The Lone Seafarer*. The specific version of the semiquaver figuration used is a varied version of the Trio at bar 73 *et seq.* (*The Lone Seafarer* bar 38 *et seq.*), which can be seen in Example 19.

Third, by expanding existing double-stopped violin dyads in *The Lone Seafarer* into fuller chords, as at bar 443 of the Trio, or by creating a chordal sequence based on the layering of a pitch square.

<sup>15</sup> Beamish 2012d. The music for Parts 3 and 4 was newly created to match with the complete poem, as will be discussed shortly.

<sup>16</sup> For copyright reasons, the publishers have requested that Examples 19–23 be housed in an online repository. See McGregor 2019 for the URL; they may also be accessed by clicking here.

Fourth, by juxtaposing previously unconnected motivic ideas – as at bar 170 (see Example 21) in the Trio which continues until the end of the section at bar 186. Beamish's approach to development is essentially uncomplicated and sparing. The expansion of material is economically achieved, and the resulting textures are lean and straightforward giving a transparency that typifies her musical style.

The formal structure of *The Lone Seafarer* has already been shown in relation to textual influence on the musical content and playing instructions, but in order to demonstrate how the Trio and Concerto have developed this, a summary of the solo work's sonata rondo-like structure will be helpful (Figure 2):

Exposition	A, B1a and b, B2, B1 varied, A(1)
Development	C
Recapitulation	A(2), B2, A(3)
Coda	

Figure 2 Structure of *The Lone Seafarer* (Summary)

Despite its relationship to the text, this is a straightforward structural architecture not determined or controlled by repetition in the poem; rather, the formal repetitions that occur have been prompted by purely musical considerations.

For the Trio, the sonata rondo form of the solo work was abandoned, and the new work was constructed in five distinct parts. The first part is quite tightly based on the Exposition A, B, A of the solo work, but with the final A cut short and pitched an octave lower. The second part begins by stating the same final A section, but now complete and at pitch, but underpinned by a development of part of the B section material, and thereafter continuing with the original Development section material. Some new material combined with internal repetition from this part of the Trio, and a recapitulation of the opening statement of the work, lead to a final flourish based on the last bar of *The Lone Seafarer* to end the second part. To this point, therefore, the only parts of the original which have not been utilised in the new work are most of the original recapitulation and the coda. The mosaic of repeated sections taken from the solo violin work makes a coherent whole as a direct result of Beamish's use of limited thematic material derived, or stemming from, the opening of the work.

Since the Trio was actually conceived as a work with projected PowerPoint illustrations, and the text of the poem is expounded in full across the whole work, Beamish has introduced, for the third part, an entirely new falling minor third figure representing a cuckoo motif suggested by the text 'the gowk repeats his plaintive geck'. This idea is not found in *The Lone Seafarer*, but provides essential contrast with the relative dissonance of the 2nd 4th and 5th intervals in most of the other sections of the Trio (Example 18).

## Example 18 Falling minor-third cuckoo motif

**Andante** (♩ = c. 80)  
243 pizz.

Vc.

Pno.

Although the majority of the thematic and accompanying material of the Trio's third part is new, Beamish refers back to the semiquaver, dotted-quaver motif (see Example 12) from the preceding part, and also interpolates the missing recapitulation section from *The Lone Seafarer*. Part three then concludes with an oscillating 6/8 idea derived from the minor third motif. Part four is a sparsely accompanied cello solo utilising a further derivation of the same minor 3rd material in augmentation underneath a more or less continuous poetic narrative. From bar 410, the piano has a chorale-like, four-part version of the thematic material which continues underneath the cello until the end of the section. Part five, the final section, recapitulates ideas heard before in the Trio, often derived from the bird calls, counterpointed by a bell-like configuration on piano. From bars 451 to 464 there is a short, developed recapitulation of the material of the B1a section of the solo work (see Example 8). The final section uses the hymn-like tune from the Coda of the original solo work alternating strings and piano before concluding with a final flourish to the text 'Amen, Amen, Amen'.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Most of the new material in the Trio is found in parts 3 and 4 and it therefore appears that the portions of the poem used by Beamish in the earlier work are from the

The new material created for Parts 3, 4 and 5 of the Trio becomes important in the division into the discrete movements of the viola concerto, and is discussed further in the next section.

### **From the Trio to the Viola Concerto No. 2, *The Seafarer***

Each of the standard three movements of the Concerto utilises thematic material from the Trio, adding a comparatively small number of new ideas, except for the opening of the third movement which is completely new.<sup>18</sup> A brief summary of the Concerto's structure in relation to the Trio will make the relationship clearer: movement 1 largely follows Part 1 of the Trio, but concludes with both the opening and closing material of Part 2; movement 2 forms an adapted palindromic arch shape built upon part 3 of the Trio, and contains music taken from the Trio's 2nd part to effect contrast; movement 3 begins with a new static chordal sequence not dissimilar in effect to equivalent parts of MacMillan's *Veni Veni Emmanuel* and *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*. The movement proceeds by alternating a sparsely accompanied viola solo with the chordal sequence. This has no direct parallel in the previous works, but replaces the equivalent fourth part of the Trio. Following a linking passage referring back to the Concerto's second movement, the final section of the Concerto reorchestrates most of Part 5 of the Trio before ending with a short internal repetition which redefines the tonal centre of C from which the concerto began. This comparison of each work's structural elements has shown the extent to which each relies on the former for its material. What emerges from an examination of repetition and the reordering of material in the Concerto is that again the poem has not been used as the structuring device for this final work in the trilogy, but that the concerto genre has dictated the manipulation of the musical ideas. The final part of this article will consider five particular examples where the development of material from one work to the next is clearly demonstrated.<sup>19</sup>

### **Tracking the Development of Ideas: Five Examples**

If there is a common theme in the critical of reception of Beamish's music, it is that an ear for orchestral colour is one of the key aspects of her compositional style. As will be seen in the examples, this relies on economy of texture combined with discrete scoring. One feature, however, which can only be hinted at in these short examples is the composer's use of percussion, notwithstanding the fact that, in the context of this work, certain percussion sounds lend themselves to

---

beginning to line 51 and then from line 117 to the end. This assumption is based on the final version of the text given in the Trio under the translator's signature.

<sup>18</sup> Beamish 2011.

<sup>19</sup> An extended examination of each work in relation to the next is both rather impractical and does not necessarily illustrate more than can be understood from these examples.

imitation of sounds of the sea, with Debussy's *La Mer* and Britten's *Sea Interludes* as possible models in the background.

Beamish makes significant use of xylophone and maracas as well as crotales and tom toms, and the fairly sparse orchestration throughout the work means that these percussion parts assume a greater prominence and importance as material added to the reused musical ideas, rather than simply functioning as supporting texture to the rest of the ensemble. Percussion is therefore used for both affect and effect, so there are parallels to be drawn between Beamish's use of percussion and that of James MacMillan; a future study might explore this aspect of both composers' work.

A few straightforward references will illustrate the composer's use of percussion in the second Viola Concerto. In bars 76–81 in movement one (see Example 19, Trio, bars 73–5), the tom-toms are used to fill the gaps in the woodwind's semiquaver figurations and to emphasise the main beats when the woodwind instruments are off the beat. As the musical material alters at bar 99 (relating to bar 118 in the Trio), Beamish changes to temple blocks. A similar function for these particular instruments is found again at the beginning of the second movement (relating to the cuckoo sound). On the other hand, the tam tam is employed at bar 156 in the first movement to help build a small climax, and likewise underscore the F pedal which accompanies the viola solo in seven of the nine bars leading to the end of the movement. Pitched percussion is treated similarly. A tubular bell sound is employed to emphasise, with flute 2, the D pedal note in a perfect fifth drone in the first movement at bar 131 *et seq.*; likewise, in movement 2, bars 220–44, the crotales first double/reinforce the violin harmonics before becoming a solo thematic counterpoint to the solo viola.

The following five representative examples therefore demonstrate the processes of expansion and selective elaboration that the composer has employed to develop the musical material from *The Lone Seafarer* through the Trio to the Concerto.<sup>20</sup> Note that the length of each extract is not significant.

*Example 19 The Lone Seafarer*, bars 38–9; Trio, bars 73–5 (i); 2nd Viola Concerto, bars 75–9 (ii). [Click here to access examples](#)

1. The use of *The Lone Seafarer* material in the Trio shows the addition of octave doubling in the cello, and a new piano part. The piano utilises material previously heard in bars 45–8, deriving in its turn from bars 33–6 in *The Lone Seafarer*.
2. The equivalent passage in the Concerto's first movement takes the left-hand part into lower strings and bassoon, and right-hand part into

---

<sup>20</sup> See McGregor 2019 for the web links which lead to Examples 19–23, or click on the links provided.

horns, then trumpets. Beamish has added tom toms to fill in the rhythmic gaps left by the semiquaver patterns in flutes and clarinets, thus emphasising the main beats. Imitation in the bassoons and oboes is added in the final bar of the extract.

*Example 20* The Lone Seafarer, bars 88–96; Trio, bars 151–6 (i and ii), Concerto, bars 147–50 (iii). [Click here to access examples](#)

1. *The Lone Seafarer* material is used in the Trio near the beginning of Part 2, the violin part now doubled by the cello at triple then quadruple octaves.
2. The piano's new material, which adds a rhythmic counterpoint, is derived from bar 73 in Part 1 of the Trio, as in Example 19, with rhythmic articulation altered.
3. In the Concerto, upper wind, cello and bassoon preserve the triple octave doubling. The piano lines have been assigned to bass clarinet and contrabassoon. Beamish has added timpani pedal notes to the texture, and there is a new viola solo, in double stopping, which is based on the imitative figure shown in the last bar of the previous Concerto example (Example 19).

*Example 21* The Lone Seafarer, bars 108–12; Trio, 170–72 (i, ii and iii); Concerto, bars 203–5 (iv, v and vi). [Click here to access examples](#)

1. This is the 'Development' section of the original work and Part 2 of the Trio – the violin pitches are unchanged, and a doubled lower D in cello is added as a pedal, more or less present from bars 167 to 172.
2. Beamish may have intended the new piano part to be an anticipation of the Trio's third part, which emphasises the falling minor third.
3. The piano demisemiquaver flourish has been derived from a similar figure in bar 122 of *The Lone Seafarer*.
4. The equivalent section in the Concerto at bars 203–5 presents the material transposed up a major 2nd (T2). Violin 2, viola and cello reproduce the original string parts from the Trio, while the piano left-hand material has been assigned to double bass with some pitches being doubled by timpani. Flourishes previously in the piano are now in clarinet and bassoon, preserving the octave doubling.
5. An added bass drum part serves to emphasise the strong beats.
6. The viola part is cadenza-like in character, and although newly shaped can be derived in essence from the piano's demisemiquaver flourishes.

In the palindromic structure, this material is repeated but transposed to T9 (that is, a 5th higher than the original) at bar 326 *et seq.* To that repeat, Beamish

has added triplet figurations in bassoon and clarinet which are probably related to a similar idea in the development section of *The Lone Seafarer*. The viola cadenza-like material of bar 203 *et seq.* is omitted in the repeat, and the viola simply reproduces a skeleton thematic statement from the original Trio material.

*Example 22* The Lone Seafarer, bars 125 and 200–6; Trio, bars 503–9 (i and ii), Concerto, bars 576 to the end (ii, iv and v). [Click here to access examples](#)

1. Bar 125 in *The Lone Seafarer* relates to the harp image from the poem and is subjected to rhythmic augmentation in bars 200–206 towards the end of the work.
2. Bars 200–206 are presented in diminution in the Trio at bar 503 *et seq.* with an added cello perfect 5th and a new, but sparse, piano part where the right hand emphasises major rather than minor thirds – probably to reflect the poetic image of ‘heaven’s haven’.
3. In the Concerto, this passage from the Trio is transposed down a fifth, returning to the initial pitch centre of the first movement.
4. The bass line from the piano left hand is in diminution, and the Trio’s piano right hand is transposed up a fourth (T5) and assigned to clarinets.
5. Finally, Beamish has added oboes, then clarinet semitonal oscillation – this probably recalls the bird-call motifs (such as found in *The Lone Seafarer* at bar 51, and at equivalent points in the other two works) which the composer developed as an oscillating semiquaver idea at the beginning of the Trio’s fifth (final) part and reused in the Concerto at bar 485 *et seq.*

*Example 23* Trio, bars 455–7 and Concerto, bars 506–8 (i - iv). [Click here to access examples](#)

There is no equivalent to this extract in *The Lone Seafarer*.

1. Original Trio string parts are now in upper woodwind, doubled in octaves.
2. The Trio piano part has been given to clarinets with strings doubling.
3. Bassoons doubled by lower strings add new imitative parts based on the cuckoo motif.
4. Brass continues the semiquaver/dotted-quaver rhythm from bar 506 to support upper woodwind and build up the climax, supported by timpani and cymbals. Here, Beamish creates one of the most significant climaxes in the work utilising only material derived from the Trio.



## Conclusion

This analysis of Beamish's *Seafarer* works has shown how the composer reflected the poetic and visual stimuli in her musical thinking such that the musical ideas had a direct relationship with the textural or visual images. In interviews, she suggested that her method of developing larger-scale compositions involves building up textures from much less complex starting points, often from slighter chamber works. The three works considered here have demonstrated different ways in which this development is achieved, principally through: use of short motivic ideas, subjected to transposition or rhythmic alteration, often in diminution or augmentation; the development of ideas within straightforward formal structures; textural expansion using orchestral timbres which are carefully controlled to preserve clarity and transparency, often involving multiple octave doublings; the derivation of new material from previously heard thematic content using standard devices of imitation and counterpoint; retaining the registral placing of material taken from the earlier works; using transposition to vary harmonic levels throughout individual works as a whole, and varying the length and placing of repetition.

This article has explored, for the first time, some of the ways in which each work of the *Seafarer* triptych builds upon its predecessor, and has shown how the original poem influenced the development of musical ideas. Both these facets – that is, the process of building greater complexity upon pre-existing material, and the importance of the stimulus for generating musical ideas – are, according to the composer herself, key elements in her musical thinking which can be traced throughout her mature working methodology. In that sense then this study has laid the groundwork for future analysis of Beamish's musical style and idea.

**Appendix: Sally Beamish Interviewed By Richard McGregor at Musica Scotica conference, 28 April 2012**

RM: I wonder if you could just tell us a little bit about your earliest influences. Where does your composition come from, your desire to compose?

SB: It goes back quite a long way because when I was about four, my mother got ticked off by my nursery school teacher for teaching me to read. In fact, I was just picking it up as children do, but apparently was learning it the wrong way, and so to distract me from trying to read cornflakes packets and things, she decided to see what would happen if she taught me to read music. She's a violinist, and she gave me a little manuscript book which I've still got on which she encouraged me to doodle things, and I drew little pictures of people and flowers on the lines, and she played them back to me so I made the connection between how notes sounded and how they looked very early, before I was playing in fact. I didn't start playing until a year or two later. I started the piano, and one of the first things I did was to write a little book about how to play the piano because I didn't want to play somebody else's piano book. I always wanted to do everything myself. So I was just naturally the kind of person that wanted to do things for myself, so I didn't see why I should let someone else do it for me.

RM: You were a viola player for quite a long time. What composers have meant the most to you in the formation of your compositional style?

SB: I don't think it ever occurred to me to study composition. I didn't think it was something I could ever make a living doing, but I knew I wanted to be a composer, but I thought I would have to support that by playing. So it seemed logical to play an orchestral instrument rather than the piano, which would have been more precarious. So I actually picked the thing I was least good at, which was the violin, and took that to college and studied violin for a year, and then kind of realised that I should probably change to the viola, and there would be more chance of work, so it was all from a practical point of view. But when I was at school, I was very fortunate to be introduced to Lennox Berkeley, and I went along and, all I can say is, I chatted to him really. It was quite funny, there was a Lennox Berkeley day at the Royal Academy in London a few months ago, and the theme was Lennox the Teacher, and Richard Rodney Bennett, was there who was one of his students, and Michael Berkeley asked him 'can you tell me what you learned from Lennox during your time with him', and he said 'absolutely nothing' [laughter] and that was the beginning of the session, Lennox the Teacher, so ... but I actually, at the end I put my hand up and said, 'actually, what Lennox did for me was to tell me I was a composer'. I think that's what I really needed, and when I was studying

in Germany, I went on from the Royal Northern College to Germany to study viola again. That was maybe because I didn't get ... I tried to transfer to composition at College and was turned down. I tried to get a scholarship to study in Italy on composition and was turned down, but I got a grant to go to Germany to study viola, so I thought, okay, and I went and did that. But while I was there I had a letter from Lennox Berkeley saying 'I feel you are a composer and you must not forget it'. So, the viola playing was all very well. But, as you can imagine, it meant an awful lot to me, because he really was a composer, and for somebody to say that to me, and I think a lot about being a composer is to do with how you see yourself and whether you really believe in yourself, and you can get rid of that little voice on your shoulder that is constantly saying 'this is rubbish', and that's the most difficult thing about creating I think. So that's what he did for me.

RM: Those of us who have done composition probably remember the crisis times: there's always a crisis time. Did you have a crisis time and how did you get through it?

SB: I was always very fluent ... I thought it took a long time to write music, until I actually started writing it full time and had to juggle with babies and things like that. And I had to pay for childcare, and so I had to pay for every hour that I was composing, and then I realised that you really could write pretty quickly, especially if you were paying for the time [laughter]. That was a great discipline. I never looked back after that. It was fantastic. I mean, just that thing of having these two babies, and they didn't sleep while I wrote music, so I had to get someone in. The first real crisis I had was after my opera, *Monster*, which for various reasons was an unhappy experience, and which had – it had some good reviews and some very bad reviews. It was my first experience really, of appalling reviews, and it really knocked me for six, particularly as I hadn't really been happy with the process, I hadn't enjoyed the process.

And for me, I'm a collaborator, I love working with people, and what I had really wanted was to work with a team, and in a big opera company that tends not to happen. You're expected to deliver the score, and then go away. I didn't like that – I didn't get to go to the first week of rehearsals. By the time I arrived, the whole thing was set. I needed 'workshopping', and it didn't happen. It needed a lot of cutting, and anyway I was left with this awful experience of having felt that the thing hadn't worked, and I just couldn't write for a while, and Janice Galloway, who had written the libretto for the opera, took me along to Stirling writers' group where she was giving a talk, and at the end of the talk she took me up to the tutor and she said, "this is Sally, she's joining the class", and it was fantastic, and for about a year I wrote words, and I learnt – it's a bit like

learning a foreign language. When you learn a foreign language, you learn how your own language works. And actually starting this process – which had never been conscious for me – of writing literature, whatever, poems, short stories, taught me about the creative process, which in a way had been very instinctive up till then, and I think at some point you do have to take stock and work out how you do things because you need that when things go wrong, you need to know how you're doing it.

RM: So, how do you come to be in Scotland? Have you been influenced since coming to Scotland, which is now a long time because you were born in London?

SB: That's right: I was born in London, but I have Scottish ancestry. I remember coming to Edinburgh a few times, and then being offered the job – I was principal viola in the Scottish Chamber Orchestra for a year before I married and lived in Edinburgh, and I just felt completely at home in Edinburgh. And I then discovered that my great grandfather had walked to London from Edinburgh to make his living, and in fact, one of the first pieces I wrote when I was in Scotland was called 'Walking Back' and I felt that I had come back to where I belonged, and I've always felt Scottish. Since I've been here it just feels right, and people refer to me as a Scottish composer, and it just feels right. So, that was sort of there naturally. After I married – I married a Scot who was living in London. I was living in Edinburgh, so we lived in London for a bit, and when the children started to come along, I think the thought of having children with English accents was just too much for him, so we moved back up and it was a fantastic thing for me – because I was moving to a small country – it was a good way of getting me out of the freelance viola world which had completely taken me over. I was writing about one piece a year when I was in London because the playing was so exciting, and I was doing all the film sessions – I did all the Inspector Morse sessions – it was just very heady stuff, it was all wonderful, and I was playing with the Academy of St. Martin's who were recording all the Beethoven Symphonies – end to end recording sessions, lots of money, and I couldn't believe it really, but of course I wasn't writing any music, although I was making connections with other players who were beginning to ask me to write things, and that was very important.

And then my viola was stolen and that kind of did it really. I was quite determined that this was going to be a positive thing that I would look back on, because it was a nightmare. Having your instrument taken is just – it's like part of yourself, and I remember making this conscious decision that this was going to become a positive thing that I would talk about, as I am now. If that hadn't happened, I wouldn't have moved to Scotland. So we moved, and one of the first things I was involved with

was a Scottish/Icelandic exchange where they were actually looking for a composer who had never written for orchestra before. A team came over from Reykjavik wanting a piece for the Reykjavik Symphony Orchestra, and I was chosen because I had no experience. I really don't think that would have happened if I had been in London. So it was a wonderful first try, actually learning on my feet really, writing a piece for orchestra when I'd never written for brass or percussion before, and the first time I heard it was under the baton of Gunther Schuller, so it was amazing really. And then getting involved with the Hebrides Ensemble, who had performed a piece that had actually been premiered in London to about ten people and no press or anything, and they did it in their debut concert up here to a packed house and national press, because it was a new Scottish group, and that I think, made people aware of the fact that I was there, and I had more commissions on the back of it. And it just took off from then on. But I felt always, that it was very much to do with being here, and it was the sort of place where you – I remember Nigel Osborne saying it feels as if you throw a handful of seeds over your shoulder, and you look back and the crop has grown. It was a very fertile place to be at that time.

RM: Let's talk about the music now ... when we had our email correspondence, I referred to your bassoon piece, *Capriccio*, which I've actually put on the [PowerPoint] slide here. In the programme note you said it was the first time you found a voice for yourself, but you came back to me saying it had just been released on CD – and you were rethinking that. So, what's the evolution been? How would you characterise your voice?

SB: Yes, I read the programme note that I'd written when I wrote that quite early piece, and I thought 'oh, well that was my voice then', and I realise how much I've changed. But that particular voice was directly as a result of having my only course of composition lessons, which was on a London Sinfonietta tour with Oliver Knussen conducting, and he knew I composed, and he said, 'right, bring some scores, and we'll look at one on every journey', and we were travelling by train between the concerts, and we went through these scores together. He was another one who made me feel that I was a composer. He would say something like 'come on, let's have a look at one of your scores, I need some ideas', and you just feel a million dollars. And I think you need that sometimes, that someone really has faith in you. And he showed me a way of manipulating notes. I had this big thing about, well, why would it be that note and not another note, and is someone going to come to me and say, why is it that chord – I was always worried about knowing exactly why I was doing everything. And he showed me a very simple system of generating mel... [sic] why I like it is because it comes from a melody – you think of a melody,

and then you make it, you generate harmonies from it by making a sort of grid, and the harmonies work with this melody.

I used that for years, and some of these pieces, like *Capriccio*, every single note I can justify by going back to the grid and saying, well, it's there because it's that. But at the same time, for some reason, you can be very musical within that, and very creative, because the more you set yourself boundaries, the more freedom you have, in a way. And it gave me the confidence – that's what I needed, so I didn't have this voice saying 'but, why is it that note?'. I knew why it was that note, and somehow I could make the lines work within that. And, as time went on, I became more confident, and was able to let go of my systems and think more creatively, or maybe, you know, decide not to use that note even though it should be the next note – I didn't like it, so I was going to choose another one, and I wasn't going to stress about that. So, I became much freer in the way I wrote. And I think the turning point was a trip to California in '99. I think it was when I was aware of the real communication between players and audiences, where the audiences really expect to be engaged by the music. And it was Jimmy's *Isobel Gowdie* [James MacMillan: *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*] that was being played and there was a standing ovation at the end, people with tears streaming down their faces, and coming up to me and saying 'do you know him?', or 'can you ask him to pray for my daughter?' – you know, they were just genuinely connected with the music and with the composer.

And it made me think about the whole thing of communication – you know, whether you're writing for yourself, whether you're writing for the audience, whether you're writing for the players. I think in my case I was writing very much for the players, as a player myself, but actually wanting to make a more immediate connection, and wanting things to be very clear and understandable, maybe not on the first hearing but eventually – you know, it had to be something that would compute in someone else's head as well. And I simplified everything right down. I wrote a string quartet called *Opus California* which was a kind of spoofy piece with a lot of jazz in it based on Beethoven. It was the result of a commission where they were asking for a piece to tie in with a particular Beethoven quartet, and it was just such fun writing something that was really going to be enjoyable to play and very immediate to listen to. I don't always write in such an immediate way, but that was a real turning point for me.

RM: So, it's a new commission – do you start with a plan for the piece or does it evolve as it goes on? If it's an orchestral piece, do you start with a short score before you do full score ... or do you write straight down?

SB: Well, I would always used to say that I would always make the plan first,

and ... It's like some novelists start at the beginning and see what happens, don't they? I could never understand how you could do that. No, I would always have the structure first, like an architect's drawing, I suppose, and then, and then, sort of fine tune into the notes which would come much later – I mean the colours would be there in my head first. I've always composed very much in my head so that the process tends to be, sort of three months of knowing that I ought to be starting a piece, and then a month of writing it down, because in fact I've been writing in my head, thinking about it a lot, thinking about it on long walks, and latterly not really writing very much down at all, so that the thing is forming more and more in my head before I start the notation process.

RM: Max [Peter Maxwell Davies] has said something similar about walking round Orkney ...

SB: ... pacing it out

RM: ... pacing it out. So, do you make, do you not make sketches now? Once upon a time you might have done?

SB: I did very much at the beginning. I remember my grandmother saying there were two reasons to tack before you do a machine seam. One was because you weren't a very good sewer, and one was because you were, and in between you needn't bother [laughter] so that you could sort of hold the thing together. So maybe I'm in between. So I've stopped the tacking for the moment – I am just writing very instinctively at the moment. Maybe you go through phases. But one thing that's had a huge influence has been doing a jazz course in, at St Andrew's University, because I was asked to do some work with a jazz musician Branford Marsalis, sax player, and he asked me to do some string – not exactly arrangements or backings, but he wanted something for string orchestra that would be played with his tunes that he does with his quartet, so that it was something that was notated, but that he could bounce off with the quartet, that he wanted me to bounce off what he had already written down, which was just the head, or the main melody of the tune. And I just didn't know where to start because I didn't know the language, and he would say things to me ... I had no idea what he was talking about. I mean, I didn't really know what a solo was in jazz. I thought solo meant playing the tune. Of course, it doesn't – it's when you don't play the tune, it's when you do a solo, and things like that I just needed to know. So I went and did this jazz course really to learn the language, but I also had to play, and I did it on piano, and I've, I discovered that I could improvise which was something I just thought – I mean, because of my start at age four of connecting always the sound with something written down, I had never got away from the page, and this was just a revelation, and I'm really, really bad at it, but it's just given me a kind of freedom and I'm

now even more ... I mean, playing a jazz solo is composing in real time, really. And I've realised that, and very often the first idea you have is the best, and you return to it. And so I'm writing more instinctively now; I'm writing much faster ... and I'm letting go of a lot of my systems now, and just relying on my instinct.

RM: Do you check things on the keyboard, or do you rely on your ear now?

SB: Less so, on keyboard, I used to write at the piano ... I don't tend to now, and I use software – I use Sibelius – so, having cut out [the piano stage] I do make some notes, I mean literally notes and fragments of things, but I go straight into the score now, and I usually find it's pretty well there.

RM: When I talked to you in 2000, you said you only worked on one piece at a time, but you said you spin one piece off another. Is that still true?

SB: Yeah, nearly always, something comes out of ... it's like making yoghurt, you know – I mean, you take a bit of the old one and start a new one. It very often happens, particularly with big orchestral pieces, I very often – well, it's since doing that first piece for Iceland where I had no idea where to start and I'd just written a piano trio, and I decided to take – it was a theme and variations – and I took the variations and orchestrated them, and then I just placed them through the piece as sort of markers, as safe havens, where I knew what I was doing, and in between I was more creative, and I found it was such a good way to work. I think the process of orchestration is very important because it's about colouring, and it's a very good way to think, and I've more recently been orchestrating other people's work – for instance, a suite made out of cello and piano music by Debussy – and that, that taught me so much about the actual colour and how you use the orchestra.

RM: That's something that critics often have picked up on ... the colour that you can evoke, and the sound. Where did that come from? Is that from playing, being a player, being involved in performance – you can, you hear things from the inside perhaps as a viola player?

SB: I think, yeah, the place where the violas sit is a good place to be, because you're right in the middle of the orchestra. I think it's maybe almost a visual thing. I also paint, and I do think it's very much connected with that – almost, almost seeing the colours. I love the process of colouring in and just imagining. I think it's very important for me to hear everything before I start fiddling around with writing it down so that I have a really clear idea of what I'm hearing in my head, and then it's a big struggle to find it because I don't have a terribly good ear, actually – I mean, I'm not, I'm not the sort of person that could sit down and write down Webern wind quintet – I would have to work really hard to do that – but I do make myself hear everything before I start the process of writing it down. I



remember my viola teacher once saying to me that the trouble was that I was just accepting what came out of the instrument and not hearing the sound I wanted to make first and then finding it, and I think it's very important that it's that way round – that you, that you don't just doodle around and find something that sounds nice and write it down, but that you really, really work at hearing something.

RM: Your website refers to your attraction for the concerto form, so what's the attraction of the concerto form?

SB: When I was about nine or ten, my mother was teaching me the violin – big mistake – and she realised that I was losing interest, and one day she gave me a lesson, and up on the stand was a Vivaldi concerto, and she explained to me what a concerto was, and if you played a concerto, you would stand in front of the orchestra and you'd have a special thing to do, and I was hooked from then on. I carried on with the violin, I think, because of that – this idea of the concerto. I think what it is about, it is that drama that is created between the soloist and the audience – very often played from memory, and having that sort of direct contact – the soloist and the conductor, the soloist and the orchestra – so that the orchestra are bouncing off what's coming from the soloist as well. So it's that kind of protagonist, the soloist, they're telling a story, often, and there's a very direct dramatic connection with the audience, and I think that's what appeals to me, and a lot of my concertos cast the soloist in the role of storyteller in some way.

RM: I've got other questions, but you [the audience] may be sitting there going 'I wish he'd ask THAT question'. Is there anyone who would like to ask Sally a particular question?

Audience member 1: Something I enjoy very much about your work, and [I want] to learn more, is your relationship with other forms of music within Scotland, and – you know – the influence, the inspiration, that traditional music aspects give or have given you. How do you see that process of re-creation in your work?

SB: It just kind of happens because in Scotland one is so surrounded by the heritage, the culture – I mean, the ceilidh every week in the village hall – and it crosses all the generations, and it's a huge thing that, that Scots are so proud of, as well that you are so aware of it. You're not aware of it in the same way in England. That sense of heritage, and the beauty of the music, was just something that was bound to affect me, I think. I've just done a piece, actually, for the Scottish Ensemble which had – which has – it's a concerto for Scottish harp and Scottish fiddle, and that was a really interesting process because it was for Chris Stout and Catriona McKay, who are composers themselves, and who improvise, and so I, I actually wrote the piece with solo parts, but I knew there was no way,

there was no way they were going to play those solo parts, and it was very funny because on the first rehearsal with the Scottish Ensemble, Chris and Catriona had been working on the piece for weeks and weeks, and it's the only concerto of mine that's been played from memory by the soloists, and at one point the leader Jonathan Morton stopped, and he said I've got a cue here, there's something wrong because Chris Stout wasn't playing, and he said I didn't fancy that bit [laughter]. It was like that it was just fantastic, you know – they left things out, they – I mean, Chris didn't like the fact that I'd written above, you know above, above the normal range of the traditional fiddle, so he said "that's not what I do, give that to those guys, don't give it to me because you won't like it". And it was just a sort of lovely open process, and I'd created quite a strong harmonic structure in the strings which they're reading, but over the top of it Chris and Katrina are taking fragments of what I had written, and they're just going off in their own direction, and I absolutely love that.

RM: What's the hardest thing about being a composer?

SB: Well, I think I sort of touched on it, and that is the voice that tells you you're no good because you just need that almost, that sort of damn cheek to do it in the first place, just put yourself out there, and I'm pretty good at not being affected by what people say, but it can really get to you, and I think a lot of composers struggle with that, with that self-consciousness, and I suppose if you stopped to think about it too much you can, you could just lose that cheek and stop, which is what happened to me. That was why it was so important to make it into a conscious process.

Audience member 2: Have you ever had a moment where you would say, that's it, I've got it, I've done it, absolutely the best it could be done?

SB: No [laughter]. No, I haven't. I think maybe the whole thing is that that doesn't happen, and you just have to keep trying. Isn't that life, though, in general? It's never perfect, that's why ...

Audience member 2: It's not perfect, but it can be the best you can do?

SB: Yeah, I always think this – oh, you know, even if I feel it's gone well, it's been great and all the rest of it, I think "well, if I'd have known it was that good, I could have done it even better" [laughter].

RM: I've heard a few composers say, in answer to the question "what's your best piece?", "the next one" [laughter]. Can I thank Sally very much for [sharing with us]? [Applause].

## Bibliography

- Andrews 2011: Joyce Andrews, 'Sally, Queen of Scots: The Rise of Scottish Composer Sally Beamish', *Journal of Singing*, 67/5 (2011): 505–15. Cited in note(s) 6
- Beamish 1992: *Capriccio* [1988] (British Double Reed Society, 1992). Cited in note(s) 4
- Beamish 1995: Sally Beamish, 'Clara' (unpublished composition, 1995). Cited in note(s) 6
- Beamish 2000: Sally Beamish, interviewed by Richard McGregor, 4 November 2000, Glasgow. Author's collection. Cited in note(s) 2, 7, 13
- Beamish 2011. Sally Beamish, *The Seafarer* [2001] (Oslo: Norsk Musikforlag A/S, 2011). Cited in note(s) 18
- Beamish 2012a: Sally Beamish, interviewed by Richard McGregor, 28 April 2012, Glasgow (included as an appendix to this article). Cited in note(s) 3, 14
- Beamish 2012b: Email from Sally Beamish to Richard McGregor, 18 July 2012. Cited in note(s) 5
- Beamish 2012c: Sally Beamish, *The Lone Seafarer* [1997–8] (Oslo: Norsk Musikforlag A/S, N.M.O. 13199, 2012). Cited in note(s) 8
- Beamish 2012d. Sally Beamish, *Trio for Narrator, Violin, Cello and Piano* [2000] (Oslo: Norsk Musikforlag A/S, 2009/2012). Cited in note(s) 15
- Beamish 2013: Email from Sally Beamish to Richard McGregor, 9 April 2013. Cited in note(s) 10
- Harrison-Wallace 1999: Charles Harrison-Wallace, 'The Seafarer', Saskatchewan (1999): <http://www.usask.ca/english/seafarer/wallacetrans.htm> (accessed October 2014). Cited in note(s) 11
- Harrison-Wallace 2013: Emails from Charles Harrison-Wallace to Richard McGregor, 11–12 April 2013. Cited in note(s) 11
- Juster 2013: Email from Hilary Juster, Programme Secretary of the Seaton and District Club, to Richard McGregor, 15 April 2013. Cited in note(s) 9

McGregor 2019: Richard McGregor, 'PowerPoint of Musical Examples 19–23': [http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/5166/1/McGregor\\_InPlainSight.pdf](http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/5166/1/McGregor_InPlainSight.pdf) (accessed October 2019). Cited in note(s) 16, 20

Riach and Peacock 2014: Amy Riach and Jila Peacock, *The Seafarer* (London: Sylph Editions, 2014). See <http://sylpheditions.com/art-monographs/the-seafarer>. Cited in note(s) 10

Tumelty 2006: Michael Tumelty, 'Sally, the Musical', *The Herald* (4 March 2006): p. 1. Cited in note(s) 1